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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000521

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER SORO TO PRESENT NEW ACTION PLAN

Classified By: Ambassador Aubrey Hooks for reasons 1.4 b/d.

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting with the Ambassador on May 16, Prime Minister Guillaume Soro focused on the following issues:

- it has taken time for him to get organized, but he will present an action plan, including a matrix timetable, next week;
- the timetable included in the Ouaga Agreement was done hastily and was not realistic;
- elections have to take place before the end of 2008;
- the UN needs to certify the election results;
- Gbagbo finally recognizes that he needs Soro to put an end to the crisis and to win elections;
- Soro and Gbagbo have reached agreement on the problem of military ranks of the Forces Nouvelles; and
- Soro will be traveling to Washington around June 15 to meet with the World Bank and IMF. END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (C) In a hour-long meeting with the Ambassador on May 16, Prime Minister Soro announced that he would be presenting his action plan, including a matrix with a timetable, to the Council of Ministers next week for final approval. He has already shared his action plan with leaders of opposition parties and has taken their comments into consideration. Soro said he also planned to meet with the diplomatic corps to present his action plan. The Prime Minister said he is aware that his Government had not yet moved forward on any major issues, but he noted that it had taken time to negotiate and set up a new Government. He emphasized that June would be a month of action.

[¶3.](#) (C) The Prime Minister confided that the Ouaga Agreement had been hastily negotiated and that the timetable laid out in that Agreement was unrealistic. His new action plan will be much more realistic. While he did not give specifics on his timetable, he stated emphatically that elections had to take place during the year 2008 or his government would lose credibility.

[¶4.](#) (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about the role of the UN in support of his action plan, PM Soro focused on security and technical expertise. However, he also insisted that the UN needed to arbitrate disputes on election issues and to certify the results of the elections. The PM said that President Gbagbo did not want to work with Gerard Stoudmann, the UN High Representative for Elections. Soro commented that he did not want to get into a fight with Gbagbo over Stoudmann, but that he did insist that it was in the interests of everybody that the UN certify that the elections were credible. Soro related that he told President Gbagbo, who thinks he can win the elections, that Gbagbo would have greater legitimacy if the UN certified that he had won the elections.

15. (C) Soro commented that the only thing that could derail the country would be elections, because the stakes are so high. He said that the fact that Gbagbo needs him to bring the country out of crisis and to win elections means that the two of them will be able to work together. He commented realistically that many compromises will have to be made on both sides, but he opined that he and President Gbagbo will be able to work out their differences to keep the political process moving forward. Soro argued that no political grouping can win elections and govern by themselves, and that will result in the formation of coalitions, which could take many different forms.

16. (C) Prime Minister Soro informed the Ambassador that he and President Gbagbo have reached agreement on the thorny issue of military ranks for soldiers in the Forces Nouvelles (FN). Soro stated that there are three categories to deal with. The first group includes the two FN generals, who will be integrated into the FANCI at their current ranks as generals. The second group is composed of officers who have been promoted within the ranks. FN officers will be integrated into the FANCI at the ranks of the most senior members of their particular class who remained in the FANCI. In the third group, the 30 non-commissioned officers who became FN officers (Commandants Wattao, Ousmane Sherif and 28 others) will be confirmed as officers at their current ranks, but will be immediately retired and not integrated into the FANCI. COMMENT: This is a very clever way of resolving this sensitive issue, especially for the third category of 30 officers who would not want to return to their previous ranks as non-commissioned officers and who would not be accepted fully as officers in the FANCI.

17. (C) Prime Minister Soro said he would be traveling to Washington around June 15 for two to three days for meetings

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with the IMF and World Bank. He hopes to meet senior officials in the Administration while in Washington. We will provide more details as we get them. On his way back from Washington, he plans to stop in Brussels to meet with EU officials.

18. (C) COMMENT: It is encouraging that Soro is aware that the Ivorian public and the international community are anxious for him to get down to the business of governing the country. It is also encouraging that Soro seems very matter-of-fact and business-like, both in terms of the Ouaga Accord and in terms of his relationship with Gbagbo. It remains to be seen, however, how much he can actually deliver. The action plan to be announced next week should be a good indication of his realism.

HOOKS